



CRS Report for Congress

“Terrorism” and Related Terms in Statute and Regulation: Selected Language

Elizabeth Martin
American Law Division¹

Summary

Congress has used the term “terrorism” often in legislation. Hundreds of federal statutes and regulations already refer to “terrorism” and related terms in a variety of other contexts. However, these statutes and regulations ultimately refer to an extremely small set of statutory definitions, current criminal law and immigration definitions among them. This report provides the current text of a few of the fundamental definitions.

Hundreds of federal statutes and regulations address terrorism, at least in part. These federal statutes and regulations range from the Department of Justice’s guidelines on the “Victims of Crime Act Compensation Grant Program,” to the Department of Commerce’s regulations restricting exports to terrorists, to the federal statute requiring the Secretary of State to transmit an annual report on international terrorist acts.² Although most of these statutory and regulatory provisions are formally accompanied by definitions of terrorism and related terms, the same statutory definitions are repeatedly used by direct reference or incorporation of identical language. In fact, there are only a relatively few original definitions of terrorism and related terms. Following is the text of some of the more prevalent of the statutory definitions organized by United States Code title.

¹ This short report was prepared under the general supervision of Larry M. Eig, Legislative Attorney, American Law Division, and revised by Charles Doyle, Senior Specialist, American Law Division.

² Other illustrative statutes referencing “terrorism” include 10 U.S.C. 829, requiring the Secretary of Defense to submit all programs and activities of the Department’s combating terrorism program as a part of the President’s annual budget, 15 U.S.C. 1681u, requiring banks to disclose certain financial information on terrorists to the FBI for counterintelligence purposes, and 42 U.S.C. 14503, waiving general limitations on the liability of government and non-profit volunteers for volunteers who have committed terrorist acts.

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6 U.S.C. 101(15). Definitions [relating to Homeland Security]

The term **terrorism** means any activity that—

(A) involves an act that—

(i) is dangerous to human life or potentially destructive of critical infrastructure or key resources; and

(ii) is a violation of the criminal laws of the United States or of any State or other subdivision of the United States; and

(B) appears to be intended--

(i) to intimidate or coerce a civilian population;

(ii) to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or

(iii) to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnaping.

6 U.S.C. 444(2). Definitions [relating to Anti-Terrorism Technology]

(A) The term “**act of terrorism**” means any act that the Secretary determines . . .

(i) is unlawful;

(ii) causes harm to a person, property, or entity, in the United States, or in the case of a domestic United States air carrier or a United States-flag vessel (or a vessel based principally in the United States on which United States income tax is paid and whose insurance coverage is subject to regulation in the United States), in or outside the United States; and

(iii) uses or attempts to use instrumentalities, weapons or other methods designed or intended to cause mass destruction, injury or other loss to citizens or institutions of the United States.

8 U.S.C. 1182(a)(3)(B). Excludable Aliens

(iii) As used in this chapter, the term “**terrorist activity**” means any activity which is unlawful under the laws of the place where it is committed (or which, if it had been committed in the United States, would be unlawful under the laws of the United States or any State) and which involves any of the following:

(I) The hijacking or sabotage of any conveyance (including an aircraft, vessel, or vehicle).

(II) The seizing or detaining, and threatening to kill, injure, or continue to detain, another individual in order to compel a third person (including a governmental organization) to do or abstain from doing any act as an explicit or implicit condition for the release of the individual seized or detained.

(III) A violent attack upon an internationally protected person (as defined in section 1116(b)(4) of Title 18) or upon the liberty of such a person.

(IV) An assassination.

(V) The use of any—

(a) biological agent, chemical agent, or nuclear weapon or device, or

(b) explosive, firearm, or other weapon or dangerous device (other than for mere personal monetary gain),

with intent to endanger, directly or indirectly, the safety of one or more individuals or to cause substantial damage to property.

(VI) A threat, attempt, or conspiracy to do any of the foregoing.

(iv) As used in this chapter, the term “**engage in terrorist activity**” means, in an individual capacity or as a member of an organization—

(I) to commit or to incite to commit, under circumstances indicating an intention to cause death or serious bodily injury, a terrorist activity;

(II) to prepare or plan a terrorist activity;

(III) to gather information on potential targets for terrorist activity;

- (IV) to solicit funds or other things of value for–
 - (aa) a terrorist activity;
 - (bb) a terrorist organization described in clause (vi)(I) or (vi)(II); or
 - (cc) a terrorist organization described in clause (vi)(III), unless the solicitor can demonstrate that he did not know, and should not reasonably have known, that the solicitation would further the organization's terrorist activity;
- (V) to solicit any individual–
 - (aa) to engage in conduct otherwise described in this clause;
 - (bb) for membership in a terrorist organization described in clause (vi)(I) or (vi)(II);
 or
 - (cc) for membership in a terrorist organization described in clause (vi)(III), unless the solicitor can demonstrate that he did not know, and should not reasonably have known, that the solicitation would further the organization's terrorist activity; or
- (VI) to commit an act that the actor knows, or reasonably should know, affords material support, including a safe house, transportation, communications, funds, transfer of funds or other material financial benefit, false documentation or identification, weapons (including chemical, biological, or radiological weapons), explosives, or training–
 - (aa) for the commission of a terrorist activity;
 - (bb) to any individual who the actor knows, or reasonably should know, has committed or plans to commit a terrorist activity;
 - (cc) to a terrorist organization described in clause (vi)(I) or (vi)(II); or
 - (dd) to a terrorist organization described in clause (vi)(III), unless the actor can demonstrate that he did not know, and should not reasonably have known, that the act would further the organization's terrorist activity. . . .

18 U.S.C. 921(22). Definitions [relating to firearms]

. . . For purposes of this paragraph, the term “**terrorism**” means activity, directed against United States persons, which–

- (A) is committed by an individual who is not a national or permanent resident alien of the United States;
 - (B) involves violent acts or acts dangerous to human life which would be a criminal violation if committed within the jurisdiction of the United States; and
 - (C) is intended–
 - (i) to intimidate or coerce a civilian population;
 - (ii) to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or
 - (iii) to affect the conduct of a government by assassination or kidnapping.
- (a) As used in this chapter [addressing crimes involving firearms] –

18 U.S.C. 2331. Definitions [relating to the crime of terrorism]

- (1) the term “**international terrorism**” means activities that–
 - (A) involve violent acts or acts dangerous to human life that are a violation of the criminal laws of the United States or of any State, or that would be a criminal violation if committed within the jurisdiction of the United States or of any State;
 - (B) appear to be intended–
 - (i) to intimidate or coerce a civilian population;
 - (ii) to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or
 - (iii) to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping; and
 - (C) occur primarily outside the territorial jurisdiction of the United States, or transcend national boundaries in terms of the means by which they are accomplished, the persons they appear intended to intimidate or coerce, or the locale in which their perpetrators operate or seek asylum;

* * *

- (5) the term “**domestic terrorism**” means activities that–

- (A) involve acts dangerous to human life that are a violation of the criminal laws of the United States or of any State;
- (B) appear to be intended--
 - (i) to intimidate or coerce a civilian population;
 - (ii) to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or
 - (iii) to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping; and
- (C) occur primarily within the territorial jurisdiction of the United States.

18 U.S.C. 2332b(g). Acts of terrorism transcending national boundaries – Definitions

(5) the term “**Federal crime of terrorism**” means an offense that–

(A) is calculated to influence or affect the conduct of government by intimidation or coercion, or to retaliate against government conduct; and

(B) is a violation of –

(i) section 32 (relating to destruction of aircraft or aircraft facilities), 37 (relating to violence at international airports), 81 (relating to arson within special maritime and territorial jurisdiction), 175 or 175b (relating to biological weapons), 175c (relating to variola virus), 229 (relating to chemical weapons), subsection (a), (b), (c), or (d) of section 351 (relating to congressional, cabinet, and Supreme Court assassination and kidnapping), 831 (relating to nuclear materials), 832 (relating to participation in nuclear and weapons of mass destruction threats to the United States) 842(m) or (n) (relating to plastic explosives), 844(f)(2) or (3) (relating to arson and bombing of Government property risking or causing death), 844(i) (relating to arson and bombing of property used in interstate commerce), 930(c) (relating to killing or attempted killing during an attack on a Federal facility with a dangerous weapon), 956(a)(1) (relating to conspiracy to murder, kidnap, or maim persons abroad), 1030(a)(1) (relating to protection of computers) , 1030(a)(5)(A)(i) resulting in damage as defined in 1030(a)(5)(B)(ii) through (v) (relating to protection of computers), 1114 (relating to killing or attempted killing of officers and employees of the United States), 1116 (relating to murder or manslaughter of foreign officials, official guests, or internationally protected persons), 1203 (relating to hostage taking), 1361 (relating to government property or contracts), 1362 (relating to destruction of communication lines, stations, or systems), 1363 (relating to injury to buildings or property within special maritime and territorial jurisdiction of the United States), 1366(a) (relating to destruction of an energy facility), 1751(a), (b), (c), or (d) (relating to Presidential and Presidential staff assassination and kidnapping), 1992 (relating to terrorist attacks and other acts of violence against railroad carriers and against mass transportation systems on land, on water, or through the air), 2155 (relating to destruction of national defense materials, premises, or utilities), 2156 (relating to national defense material, premises, or utilities), 2280 (relating to violence against maritime navigation), 2281 (relating to violence against maritime fixed platforms), 2332 (relating to certain homicides and other violence against United States nationals occurring outside of the United States), 2332a (relating to use of weapons of mass destruction), 2332b (relating to acts of terrorism transcending national boundaries), 2332f (relating to bombing of public places and facilities), 2332g (relating to missile systems designed to destroy aircraft), 2332h (relating to radiological dispersal devices), 2339 (relating to harboring terrorists), 2339A (relating to providing material support to terrorists), 2339B (relating to providing material support to terrorist organizations), 2339C (relating to financing of terrorism), 2339D (relating to military-type training from a foreign terrorist organization), or 2340A (relating to torture) of this title;

(ii) sections 92 (relating to prohibitions governing atomic weapons) or 236 (relating to sabotage of nuclear facilities or fuel) of the Atomic Energy Act of 1954 (42 U.S.C. 2122 or 2284);

(iii) section 46502 (relating to aircraft piracy), the second sentence of section 46504 (relating to assault on a flight crew with a dangerous weapon), section 46505(b)(3) or (c)

(relating to explosive or incendiary devices, or endangerment of human life by means of weapons, on aircraft), section 46506 if homicide or attempted homicide is involved (relating to application of certain criminal laws to acts on aircraft), or section 60123 (b) (relating to destruction of interstate gas or hazardous liquid pipeline facility) of title 49; or

(iv) section 1010A of the Controlled Substances Import and Export Act (relating to narco-terrorism).

22 U.S.C. 2656f. Annual Country Reports on Terrorism

(d) As used in this section—

(1) the term “**international terrorism**” means terrorism involving citizens or the territory of more than 1 country;

(2) the term “**terrorism**” means premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents; and

(3) the term “**terrorist group**” means any group practicing, or which has significant subgroups which practice, international terrorism.

22 U.S.C. 2780(d). Transactions with Countries Supporting International Terrorism

(d) Countries covered by prohibition. The prohibitions contained in this section apply with respect to a country if the Secretary of State determines that the government of that country has repeatedly provided support for **acts of international terrorism**. For purposes of this subsection, such acts shall include all activities that the Secretary determines willfully aid or abet the international proliferation of nuclear explosive devices to individuals or groups, willfully aid or abet an individual or groups in acquiring unsafeguarded special nuclear material, or willfully aid or abet the efforts of an individual or group to use, develop, produce, stockpile, or otherwise acquire chemical, biological, or radiological weapons.